

THREE RECENT BIBLE TRANSLATIONS: A NEW TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

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I. INTRODUCTION

As certainly noted in the other reviews in this series, the three translations under consideration in this review, *The Message*, the *NET Bible* or *New English Translation* (The NET), and the *English Standard Version* (ESV) differ radically in purpose and therefore tone. The NET is full of notes, both study notes and translator's notes, which include transliterated Greek, Greek characters, and textual information (including the traditional symbols of a selection of textual witnesses). In linguistic tone it has chosen to be a relatively contemporary study Bible. The ESV, on the other hand, deliberately seeks to be traditional, to emulate the stately English of the RSV and older translations. My edition came without significant notes other than central column cross references. *The Message* is unabashedly contemporary in its language, aiming at an audience that is, if anything, unfamiliar with the Bible. These three are diverse indeed.

In two ways all three are similar. First, all are computer-friendly. The NET is freely available on the web as well as purchasable in the Logos/Libronix system, while the other two came with accompanying CDs for use on my computer. Thus even a traditional translation is not so traditional as to be only a paper product. Since I do not carry a paper Bible outside my home and office (I have German, Greek, Hebrew, and English versions on my HP Jornada, which is always with me and far handier to use), this admission of contemporary reality is welcome. To my knowledge only the NET and ESV have a Windows CE version; perhaps the audience of *The Message* would be unlikely to use such a version. The one caveat I must add is that I had to install a new program on my desktop computer to run the ESV and *The Message*, for I did not find ESV available in my normal biblical software and chose not to pay to unlock *The Message*. Second, all use the paragraph as the primary division of the text, *The Message* (in the printed edition) leaving out verse numbers altogether and the ESV putting them in bold superscript where they are not too obtrusive. The NET puts them in bold regular type with the chapter number repeated for each verse, which is a rather irritating feature if one wishes to read more than a verse or two.

When we move beyond the outward features, it is fair to ask, "How does one review a Bible translation?" Since we are not critiquing the content of what is being translated (as one might with a translated NT commentary

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or monograph), we need to examine the effectiveness of the translation in communicating the message of the original text. As an active scholar who both teaches seminary students and works within the context of a church, I have two constituencies in view. Thus my main consideration will be how helpful each of these translations will be to one or the other of the constituencies. Will *The Message* assist someone new to an Alpha course in understanding what God wishes to say to him or her? It is clearly not aimed at the seminary student or even the elders in the local church. Will the NET actually assist a pastor or serious student of the Scripture to understand it better? Will the ESV be especially helpful to some constituency in the Church? These are the questions that need to be raised. Furthermore, as the reader will quickly see, “helpful” or “assist” means both “communicate understandably” and “communicate the sense of the underlying Greek text accurately.” Neither side of the balance can be neglected.

Before turning to some sample passages, a general comment is in order. When it comes to communicating the Greek text, the NET, as noted above, has textual notes. From my point of view, the limited selection of witnesses is well-chosen as far as it goes, but one should be aware that the selection is indeed limited. For example, the papyrus witnesses to the catholic epistles are absent and the Byzantine tradition is represented by a single uncial (W). The question this raises is, “Who would use these notes?” Does a person who is reading the Bible in English need even such limited textual notes, especially if she reads no Greek? Should not those who can read Greek be referred to a critical Greek text where they can compare various readings in Greek? This is a significant general issue that the NET raises when one asks how useful it is to its putative constituency. It also raises the question of exactly who makes up this constituency.

II. EXAMPLES

With that question raised, let us turn to specifics. We will look at how each translation handles a series of four texts, texts chosen more or less at random from Paul, the Gospels, and the general epistles, which should bring out the differences among the translations.

1. *Example 1.* 1 Cor 7:1 – 5 (in each case the full paragraph is included to reveal differences in paragraph divisions).

NET	<i>The Message</i>	ESV
7:1 Now with regard to the issues you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman sexually.” 7:2 But because of immoralities, each man	Now, getting down to the questions you asked in your letter to me. First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations? [2] Certainly—but only within a certain	Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” [2] But because of the temptation to sexual

should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. **7:3** A husband should give to his wife her sexual rights, and likewise a wife to her husband. **7:4** It is not the wife who has the rights to her own body, but the husband. In the same way, it is not the husband who has the rights to his own body, but the wife. **7:5** Do not deprive each other, except by agreement for a definite time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then resume your relationship, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. **7:6** I say this as a concession, not as a command. **7:7** I wish that everyone was as I am. But each has his own gift from God, one this way, another that.

context. It's good for a man to have a wife, and for a woman to have a husband. Sexual drives are strong, but marriage is strong enough to contain them and provide for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder. [3] The marriage bed must be a place of mutuality—the husband seeking to satisfy his wife, the wife seeking to satisfy her husband. [4] Marriage is not a place to “stand up for your rights.” Marriage is a decision to serve the other, whether in bed or out. [5] Abstaining from sex is permissible for a period of time if you both agree to it, and if it's for the purposes of prayer and fasting—but only for such times. Then come back together again. Satan has an ingenious way of tempting us when we least expect it. [6] I'm not, understand, commanding these periods of abstinence—only providing my best counsel if you should choose them.

immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. [3] The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. [4] For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. [5] Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

None of the translations makes the mistake of the NIV, “It is good for a man not to marry” (this is corrected in the TNIV). Both the NET and the ESV correctly translate the sexual idiom as “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” Both indicate through quotation marks (and the NET also through a note) that this is probably a quotation of a statement made in the Corinthian letter to Paul. Here *The Message* misses the sense with the

translation, “First, Is it a good thing to have sexual relations? Certainly—but only within a certain context.” On the contrary, both here and in 7:6–9 Paul indicates that he approves of *abstinence* from sexual relations, but realizes that such abstinence is not practical, since it would lead to immorality on the part of those not having Paul’s gift of celibacy. *The Message* significantly softens Paul’s bias towards singleness/celibacy. However, neither the NET nor the ESV is totally understandable after 7:1. The NET’s “because of immoralities” is literal, but unusual English usage. The ESV’s “the temptation to sexual immorality” is better English, although more expansive (was Paul’s concern temptation or actual instances of sexual immorality?). Yet in the next verse the NET’s “sexual rights” is far more understandable than the ESV’s “conjugal rights”. I wonder what a random sampling of my church (or a seminary class) would reveal as to the understanding of “conjugal rights”? Would the understanding be specifically sexual, or would it be more legal? Would they know that this is a specifically marital term, or would they understand it as more general? Archaic English is only helpful if you have people who actually understand it.

2. *Example 2.* Gal 5:7–12 (chosen because of the Jewish cultural practices and the use of a proverb).

NET	<i>The Message</i>	ESV
5:7 You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?	You were running superbly! Who cut in on you, deflecting you from	You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?
5:8 This persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.	the true course of obedience? [8] This detour doesn’t come	[8] This persuasion is not from him who calls you. [9] A little leaven
5:9 A little yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise. 5:10 I am confident in the Lord that you will accept no other view. But the one who is confusing you will pay the penalty, whoever he may be.	from the One who called you into the race in the first place. [9] And please don’t toss this off as insignificant. It only takes a minute amount of yeast, you know, to permeate an entire loaf of bread. [10] Deep	leavens the whole lump. [10] I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view than mine, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. [11] But if I, brothers, still
5:11 Now, brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. 5:12 I wish those agitators would	down, the Master has given me confidence that you will not defect. But the one who is upsetting you, whoever he is, will bear the divine judgment. [11] As for the rumor that I continue to	preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. [12] I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

go so far as to castrate themselves! preach the ways of circumcision (as I did in those pre-Damascus Road days), that is absurd. Why would I still be persecuted, then? If I were preaching that old message, no one would be offended if I mentioned the Cross now and then—it would be so watered-down it wouldn't matter one way or the other. [12] Why don't these agitators, obsessive as they are about circumcision, go all the way and castrate themselves!

The first two verses are almost identical in the NET and ESV, and then the ESV uses the traditional “leaven” and “leavens” for the proverb in 5:9 and the NET uses “yeast” and “makes the whole batch of dough rise.” It would be interesting to find out how many people know the meaning of “leaven” as either noun or verb; “yeast” one can find in any grocery store. *The Message* recasts the first two verses so that Paul's race metaphor is maintained and thus “persuasion” becomes “detour” due to someone “deflecting” them. Paul might well applaud, although, since he often mixes his metaphors with alacrity, he might not understand why this improved his style. (He certainly would have understood the substitution of “Master” for the traditional “Lord” of the ESV and NET, for “Lord” is meaningless in our culture and “Master” at least has the possibility of communicating the sense of leadership that *kyrios* implied for Paul's generation and that “Lord” would have implied when the English-speaking world had lords with authority.) The rest of the passage is also virtually identical in the NET and ESV with four exceptions: (1) the NET uses the livelier “Now” instead of the more literal “But I” at the start of 5:11, which is more readable, but loses the emphatic “I” of Paul's Greek; (2) the NET refers to Paul's opponents in 5:12 as “agitators,” while the ESV preserves the traditional “those who unsettle you” (a more word-for-word translation); and (3) the NET wishes that they “would go so far as to castrate themselves” while the ESV wishes they “would emasculate themselves,” again using an archaic term. *The Message* is, as expected, far more dynamic. Probably rightly it refers to “the rumor that I continue to preach the ways of circumcision” (which was perhaps claimed by Paul's opponents), although the addition “(as I did in those pre-Damascus Road days)” is likely not correct,

for before his conversion Paul would not have been concerned with the issue of whether Christians needed to be circumcised or not, since he viewed them at any rate as apostates or blasphemers who had put themselves outside the covenant. More problematic is the translation “no one would be offended if I mentioned the Cross now and then,” for if the cross refers to the death of the Messiah, it would be equally offensive whether mentioned frequently or less often. Or if, as is more likely, the cross refers to the need for both Jews and Gentiles to come to Christ on the same basis, i.e. the need of Jews to come into the new covenant, then the issue is not frequency, but the fact that if circumcision were the way in, then the cross is not. *The Message’s* translation of 5:12 is similar to that in the NET.

The fourth difference is the fact that the NET addresses the passage to “brothers and sisters” and the ESV uses the traditional “brothers” (in each case with the alternative translation in the notes). The question is, “Is this passage only addressed to the male members of the churches?” If it is not, then the ESV will miscommunicate to those under 50 who are not bilingual (understanding, for example, both King James English and contemporary English). My daughters would not hear themselves addressed by this verse, and even though, with some thought (they both have university degrees), they would realize upon reflection that probably they are intended, they would still not *feel* addressed. If inclusive language is a matter of making those whom the author intended to address intuitively grasp that fact, then the ESV fails to communicate Paul’s intention in this passage. *The Message* avoids the whole issue in that there is no noun of address nor are there pronouns referring to the opponents, whom the NET (and of course the ESV) indicates are male (i.e. assumes that the Greek masculine is not generic). While works like 1 and 2 Timothy indicate that not all those teaching error were male, the reference to castrating themselves may indicate that Paul knows that in this case the person (or persons, if the singular is distributive) is—unless Paul’s curse is only a play on circumcision.

3. *Example 3.* Matt 6:5–15 (chosen as a Gospel passage that involves cultural practices).

NET	<i>The Message</i>	ESV
<p>6:5 “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, because they love to pray while standing in synagogues and on street corners so that people can see them. Truly I say to you, they have their reward 6:6 But whenever you pray, go</p>	<p>“And when you come before God, don’t turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat? [6] “Here’s what I want</p>	<p>“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] But when you pray,</p>

into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you. **6:7** When you pray, do not babble repetitiously like the Gentiles, because they think that by their many words they will be heard. **6:8** Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. **6:9** So pray this way:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be honored, **6:10** may your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. **6:11** Give us today our daily bread, **6:12** and forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors. **6:13** And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

6:14 “For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **6:15** But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive you your sins.

you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace. [7] “The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They’re full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. [8] Don’t fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and he knows better than you what you need. [9] With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply. Like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,
Reveal who you are.
[10] Set the world right;
Do what’s best—
as above, so below.
[11] Keep us alive with three square meals.
[12] Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others.
[13] Keep us safe from ourselves and the Devil.

You’re in charge!
You can do anything

go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. [7] “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. [9] Pray then like this:

‘Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
[10] Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
[11] Give us this day our daily bread,
[12] and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
[13] And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.’

[14] For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

you want!
 You're ablaze in
 beauty!
 Yes. Yes. Yes.'

[14] "In prayer there is a connection between what God does and what you do. You can't get forgiveness from God, for instance, without also forgiving others. [15] If you refuse to do your part, you cut yourself off from God's part.

This passage illustrates the differences between the NET and ESV very well. The ESV has followed the traditional wording of the Lord's Prayer, while the NET has in several instances chosen more contemporary expressions. For instance, "hallowed" would be unusual in contemporary speech, but "may your name be honored" expresses the sense of *ἁγιασθῆτω* in contemporary language. Likewise "sins" is more common than "trespasses", although one could argue that "trespasses" is more accurate. On the other hand, "to pray while standing" (NET) surely catches the emphasis of the Greek construction better than "to stand and pray" (ESV), which puts the attendant circumstance on the same level as the main focus, i.e. praying.

In this passage *The Message* is certainly contemporary, but again we have questions as to whether it adequately represents Matthew's concerns. *The Message* is certainly right that the concern is that one not make a "theatrical production" of prayer (although this expression allows the translation to sidestep the cultural location of the synagogue), but in 6:7 it seems to lose the point by shifting the role-playing to that done before God. Nor is the point that one does or does not "sense God's grace," but that God will or will not reward one (thought of either as concrete responses to prayer now or eschatological reward later—in Matthew the "later" seems to predominate). Furthermore, in 6:7 another part of Matthew's point is lost, in that he was focusing on pagan practices and *The Message* focuses on issues in the contemporary church, issues that may be similar in effect (i.e. they are an attempt to manipulate the deity), but are not necessarily so. In the Lord's Prayer itself, *The Message's* "Reveal who you are" is hardly equivalent to the sense of *ἁγιασθῆτω*. Also, "Keep us forgiven with you and forgiving others" misses the conditionality expressed in Matthew, and, "Keep us safe from ourselves" misses the idea of testing, which is a deeply rooted biblical concept. In other words, while there are verses in this text that *The Message* arguably expresses well in contemporary language and culture (the cultural translation being as important as the linguistic translation), there are other passages

where Matthew's sense is missed, sometimes because it is simply misunderstood and sometimes because it is replaced with contemporary concerns that are not equivalent.

4. *Example 4.* 1 Pet 2:4–10 (chosen because of the extensive intertextuality).

NET	<i>The Message</i>	ESV
<p>2:4 So as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but chosen and priceless in God's sight, 2:5 you yourselves as living stones are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood and to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 2:6 For it says in scripture, "Look, I lay in Zion a stone, a chosen and priceless cornerstone, and whoever believes in him will never be put to shame." 2:7 So you who believe see his value, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, 2:8 and a stumbling-stone and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 2:9 But you are a <i>chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own</i>, so that you may <i>proclaim the virtues of the one who called you</i></p>	<p>Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. [5] Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you'll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. [6] The Scriptures provide precedent:</p> <p>"Look! I'm setting a stone in Zion, a cornerstone in the place of honor. Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation will never have cause to regret it."</p> <p>[7] To you who trust him, he's a Stone to be proud of, but to those who refuse to trust him,</p> <p>"The stone the workmen threw out is now the chief foundation stone."</p> <p>[8] For the untrusting it's</p>	<p>As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, [5] you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [6] For it stands in Scripture:</p> <p>"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."</p> <p>[7] So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,</p> <p>"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"</p> <p>[8] and</p> <p>"A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."</p>

out of darkness into his marvelous light. **2:10** You once were *not a people*, but now you are God's people. You were *shown no mercy* but now you have received mercy.

“. . . a stone to trip over,
a boulder blocking the way.”

They trip and fall because they refuse to obey, just as predicted.

[9] But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you— [10] from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. [9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The first issue in this passage is the handling of OT citations in the NT. The NET indicates an OT citations with bold, italicized type and sometimes also with quotation marks, while it indicates OT allusions with regular italics. The ESV indicates OT citations by quotation marks and indentation, while it does nothing typographically to indicate allusions. Both versions supply notes to indicate which OT text is cited or alluded to. In this stylistic difference, the ESV is more aesthetic, but it fails to give as much information as the NET (the references in the ESV are sometimes simply cross-references indicating the source of a quotation or allusion; the translator's notes in the NET make the meaning of the reference clear). On the other hand, the NET leaves itself open to critique as to why it chose to call the phrases in 2:9 allusions and those in 2:10 citations. Also, one wonders why quotation marks are used in some instances but not in others.

When it comes to the translation itself, we again find the NET and ESV comparable, except that the NET uses more contemporary style and wording. The NET would be easier to read for the average North American church member and the text would not feel as antiquated. Surprisingly, despite its gender-inclusive (or, as they put it, gender-accurate) translation theory, the NET uses “men” in 2:4 rather than “people” or “human beings.” Does Peter think that only males rejected Jesus? Is it not that the people as a whole did? The ESV naturally chooses “men” because it is the traditional wording. On the other hand, there is a substantial difference between the two translations in 2:7 in that the ESV has interpreted the dative construction as “the honor is for you who believe,” while the NET (and *The Message*) follow the more

traditional “so you who believe see his value” (NET; compare NRSV “To you then who believe, he is precious” and NIV “Now to you who believe, this stone is precious”). In this case the ESV may have picked up the cultural meaning in that in the previous verse shame is negated for the one who believes, so it is not surprising to find the idea now stated positively, “Honor is for your who believe.” The other translations pick up on the reference to value earlier in the preceding verse, although the Greek terms used in the two verses are not identical.

Again, *The Message* is far more contemporary in its wording. In this passage, in contrast to our previous examples, there are no glaring problems. “Spiritual sacrifices” and “acceptable” is indeed interpreted as “Christ-approved lives,” but arguably rightly. There are other alternative understandings for this and other exegetical decisions that have been made, but there is nothing here that would not find significant support in the literature.

III. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We are now in a position to draw our data together. We have been selective in our comparison passages, but, we hope, not unfairly so. They come from the major bodies of literature in the NT and give each translation the ability to express its strengths and weaknesses. Taken together, this information should give us a reasonable basis for comparison without making this review excessively long.

Two of our translations are making an attempt to address the contemporary world. Both *The Message* and the NET use contemporary vocabulary, *The Message's* strong suit being the extent to which it does so. Both of these translations use gender-inclusive language, *The Message* doing so without comment and the NET defending its position. Thus both write in the English actually used today. Both have tried to adapt to the contemporary communication, the NET by being tested and available on the internet, and *The Message* by its blatantly contemporary idiomatic linguistic choices.

Our third translation has tradition as a chief value, so its language is traditional and the contemporary world is not a significant value except insofar as contemporary scholarship has required different translation choices than are found in the RSV or KJV. This means that the ESV, while an accurate translation with a beautiful stately tone, is somewhat archaic. Its language is not the language of contemporary communication, which will make it too difficult to read for many in the Church and which will lead to misunderstanding on the part of others. For those who have cut their teeth on the KJV, the ESV may be a good choice, so long as they realize that they have a special linguistic background and do not expect that others without their background will necessarily find it as clear and understandable as they do. Furthermore, for many contemporary readers the effect of the language will be to distance the Bible, God, and the faith from contemporary life, for this translation and the churches that may use it speak a different language than the one that the readers/members use in the world. This unintentional effect may be more negative than the problem of misunderstanding.

THE NET shares the ESV's quality of translation. There are indeed places where we would make different decisions, but in general both are solid

translations—we saw above some instances where the NET appeared more accurate and other instances where the ESV had the edge. The NET certainly communicates better than the ESV. However, its wealth of notes makes it a Bible with a limited audience. It will take a serious Bible reader to want to wade through the information presented, whether presented in the text itself in the various typefaces and frequent footnote numbers or in the footnotes. This person will be a reader who is not put off by Greek characters or references to the manuscript tradition, yet finds the level of explanation in the footnotes useful. The level of explanation will not be enough to interest scholars and many of the more-educated pastors, but it could satisfy many less-educated pastors and relatively sophisticated lay people. Thus the NET is a translation for a niche market, that group of readers with a serious interest in biblical study and some exposure to Greek (in the NT), but which does not have the education to use the Greek text itself. For such people this will be an excellent study Bible. Furthermore, it is innovative in that it is continually under revision, revision that one can check on via the internet.

The Message is a wonderful work in terms of communication. It reads well. It is the type of work that one could put in the hand of any reader of American English—its being idiomatic, one should be careful about using it in a British context—and they would understand what they read, whether or not they had a church background. Yet our examination has repeatedly turned up the fact that the quality of the translation is quite uneven. Where Peterson fully understands the original text, he does a brilliant job of communication. Where he does not, he does an equally good job of miscommunication. This, then, is as much a reading of Scripture as Scripture itself. In this sense it shares many of the weaknesses of the original *Living Bible*, although lacking some of the latter's "evangelicalese." Still, because of its readability it may have a use as a Bible to give to those just exploring the Christian faith and perhaps to new believers, although even here I would be cautious, in that I wonder how much would have to be unlearned later?

Each of these translations, then, is for a niche market. The ESV works well for those for whom the KJV or RSV are a fond memory, a group that is for the most part aging and growing smaller. The NET works for the serious student of the Bible, but one without a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. One would hope that this group would grow, but must recognize that most people will not want to put in the effort. *The Message* works best for the interested "not-yet-Christian" and the new believer, yet it works at the expense of accuracy. One would hope that its readers would grow beyond it.

As for me, I have seen nothing in these translations that will change my own behavior, i.e. the use of the NRSV for teaching purposes and the use of the *New Living Translation* for family devotions and other contexts where readability and ease of communication are primary concerns.